

Subject: Comments on Critical Habitat for Southern Resident Orcas

From: "John Braden" <John.Braden@Seattle.Gov>

Date: Mon, 21 Aug 2006 10:50:47 -0700

To: <orcahabitat.nwr@noaa.gov>

CC: "Mark Plunkett" <Mark.Plunkett@Seattle.Gov>

Please accept these comments from the Seattle Aquarium with regard to the proposed critical habitat for the Southern resident orcas.

John Braden
Director, the Seattle Aquarium

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Inspiring conservation of our marine environment.

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August 21, 2006

NOAA Fisheries Service
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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed critical habitat for Southern Resident orca whales. The Seattle Aquarium has enjoyed a productive partnership with NOAA in recent years with our joint Family Activity Center focused on resident orca whale conservation. We share your concern for the recovery of our resident killer whales and the protection of their critical habitat.

The Seattle Aquarium strongly supports your proposed critical habitat including most of Puget Sound, the San Juan Islands and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Designating the roughly 2,500 square miles of habitat in which the orcas are most commonly found is a strong step forward for recovery. However, we ask you include Hood Canal as critical habitat as well. In our view, critical habitat must be not just where orcas swim but also the source of food. Hood Canal provides a major source of salmon runs that help to sustain resident orcas. In addition, it is currently one of the most stressed sub-units of the Sound.

In terms of potentially affected activities within the proposed habitat, we would like to continue to partner with you educating the public about whale-friendly behaviors such as careful lawn/garden practices, fish conservation, and responsible whale watching. We have produced an engaging flyer on orca conservation that we encourage you to consider using. Please see it on our website at www.seattleaquarium.org under "Conservation" and "Help Save our Orcas". Please contact Mark Plunkett, Conservation Curator at 206-386-4344 or mark.plunkett@seattle.gov to discuss how we may expand our NOAA/Seattle Aquarium orca education partnership.

Again, we commend you for your actions to bring about recovery of our resident orcas and look forward to helping you implement your action plan.

Sincerely,

John Braden, Director